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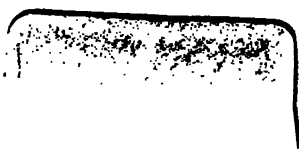
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# Beggar by Charles Charrington



Thos G Rainers

NBO



## **A Sturdy Beggar**

**"What shapest thou in the world?**

**'Tis shaped long ago."**

***Goethe.***

# A Sturdy Beggar

BY  
Charles Charrington

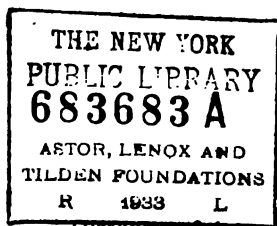


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# A Sturdy Beggar

## CHAPTER I

### "PRUDENCE"

I WAS fighting hard for life. It was four months since I had left Paris full of hope. A well-to-do uncle had made me a small allowance, which enabled me to study there as a sculptor for three years, and I had worked and lived hard and enjoyed myself thoroughly. My last statue had been honoured with a prize at the Salon, and still more honoured with the praises of the great Nidor, in whose studio I had worked.

At the end of the three years my uncle, who had recently married a second time, wrote me that I must now

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earn my own living. He would, he said, make me a present of £500 for a start, and I must then expect nothing further from him.

Of course I never dreamed of earning money in Paris. Paris—the centre of modern art-life—meant heaven to me. Whoever heard of a heaven in which one earns money? London, as all the world knows, is the place to make a fortune, and I resolved to set up in London. Some day I should have earned enough money to live in heaven again. I took a studio in Chelsea, and brought over all my *chefs d'œuvre*.

I found myself pretty lonely at first. My father and mother had been Londoners, but had both died when I was a boy, so I had inherited no friends. The only man I knew well there was John P. Stringer. He paid me a visit

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in my new studio the evening I came from Paris.

After he had helped me to unpack some of my stuff, we sat chatting over our absinthe from a bottle which I had imported free of duty, and being very little used to it, he soon began to spread himself in his most genial fashion.

“London is getting more artistic every day,” he cried enthusiastically, “and I flatter myself I’ve done something to bring it about.”

Stringer was a very little man, not more, I should say, than five feet four, and rather fat and fussy. Perhaps it was this shortcoming in stature which made his enthusiasm always seem to me more comical than convincing.

He was the art critic on the *Raree Show*, and also, I had heard, wrote for several country papers. He had been

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over to Paris, where I had made his acquaintance, had thoroughly enjoyed our queer life, and had returned to his work full of our phrases. He may have had some knowledge too. I don't know. I'm not a critic. He had a great admiration for my work, so I tried to believe he had. At any rate he was a very kind fellow, and especially eloquent and friendly under the influence of the absinthe.

I was rather tired and dispirited after a bad passage and a busy day at unpacking, and London seemed to me as dreary as I had feared. Among some of Stringer's drawbacks was a love of politics. He was an advanced radical, and I knew I should soon have some of what he called his "progressive propaganda." I was not wrong.

"None of your damned French cyn-

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icism,” he cried, in reply to some disparaging remark of mine about London, and what he called its “art schools.” “London is rousing herself as England did in Milton’s days. You remember Milton’s grand prose? *That* exactly describes London at present.”

“I have n’t read Milton’s prose works,” I answered, yawning, “but I’ve read something very like what you are saying in the newspapers, and it bores me.”

“Not read Milton’s prose!” he shouted. He had a disagreeable way of shouting when he was emphatic, engendered by speaking at public meetings.

“Not read Milton’s prose,” I echoed wearily.

“Perhaps you’ve heard of the Unification of London,” he cried.

“Is that Milton?” I asked.



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"No, you idiot!" replied he.

"Ah, then it's the newspapers," I said; "I don't understand politics."

I thought I had shut him up, but the absinthe was too potent for me.

"You artists never see beyond the end of your paint-brushes," he rejoined contemptuously. "Don't you see what it means? It's not a political, it's a social question, — a question which concerns us all. You remember Ruskin —"

"I've not *read* Ruskin," I interjected hastily, — but he was fairly started, and I saw that even if I *had* read him, I should have been obliged to hear Stringer tell me what he had written.

"He gave the citizens at Bradford some advice when he was asked about their new Town Hall," he went on; "He told them that while they wor-

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shipped the Goddess of Getting-On, it did n't matter what they built, they could have no true beauty in their city. But now we Londoners are attaining some real social idea, — some true organised life. We have a nobler, purer ideal; we have —”

I felt that I could bear no more.

“Stop, my dear fellow,” I cried desperately. “Stop and have another absinthe.”

It was a temporary expedient, and was temporarily successful. He stopped to help himself, and was silent for a minute, and when he started again, spoke, to my relief, in a quieter, if still more impressive tone.

“At any rate,” he said solemnly, after taking a sip or two at his glass, — “at any rate you have heard of a parish council?”

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"Has it anything to do with a parish beadle?" I asked, — Mr. Bumble represented the parochial authorities to me.

"*I* am a member of a parish council," he added, with even greater importance of tone. And I felt it necessary to congratulate him.

"I am glad chiefly for your sake," he added; and I could n't help glancing at the absinthe to see how much he had taken.

"Yes, I've been working at the idea for months," he went on, brightening up under my look of astonishment. "I've deluged the local paper of Somerville with letters and articles. I've organised demonstrations, I've arranged house to house canvassing by ladies, — I've even spoken to mass meetings in Somerville Park, and at last I am successful. We have voted £500 for a

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statue to stand outside our Parish buildings. What do you say to that ! ”

“ It looks like business, anyhow,” I had to admit. “ But you can’t get a statue for £500.”

“ So we found,” replied my friend. “ It seems it will cost £1,000 at least, even by a new man. But I was n’t daunted by that, and within a month I had another £500 promised by private subscription.”

“ You *must* have worked ! ” I said admiringly.

“ I should think so,” rejoined Stringer; “ but I’ve carried my point, or very nearly. I wanted the statue to represent Collectivism.”

“ Rather difficult,” said I.

“ Yes, and I was forced to give way on this point. Mr. Shipton, who owns our principal stores in Somerville, — a

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splendid character, who picked up a shilling when a boy and invested it in three dozen damaged oranges, selling them at a halfpenny each, and all that kind of thing, you know, — gave £250 on condition that the statue should be called Prudence. There's to be an open competition, but you need not mind that. Go in for the work without fear, and I'll undertake that you shall win."

There were tears in the eyes of the dear emotional fellow as he finished his second absinthe and shook me warmly by the hand.

"I'll do my best," I said as heartily as I could. Prudence was not a very inspiring idea. Among other things it suggested that the statue would mean a great expense in material, and that it was to be done on speculation.

On figuring out the matter, I found

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that I should have a very small margin of profit, if any. However, I determined to set to work at it at once, as it had to be finished in three months.

Encouraged by Stringer, I stuck very close to my work, and in the allotted time had produced something fairly satisfactory to myself. Vestrymen had constantly visited my studio and given me their ideas as to the way in which “Prudence” should be represented. I found that their minds moved only in one direction — money. For the men, “*Make* money” was the first law of prudence. “*Keep* it,” the second. Women were only concerned with the second. “The single women,” explained Mr. Shipton, to whom I was specially indebted for advice, “the single women should keep the bit of money that is given them.”

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"And the married ones?" I asked. Though a married man, he did not seem to have considered this part of the community, but on the whole thought that their duty lay principally in taking care of what their husbands chose to give them. If "prudence," as a Latin dictionary I consulted informed me, meant foresight, I determined not to make Prudence masculine.

There was indeed in their minds another personification of "prudence," — a young girl with a rooted distrust and terror of the opposite sex; but such a presentment as this they considered almost indecent, and quite un-English.

My statue, of which I first made a small sketch in wax, at length shaped itself as a woman about thirty years of age; the figure, which was tall and well-developed, was completely draped.

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The left foot, stepping forward, was pressed on some books of poems, half-hidden among flowers, while the left hand was held in front of the body, and decorated with a large wedding-ring in gold, — the only golden touch in the statue, which was to be of marble. On this ring she fixed her eyes with an expression rather severe than serene, and a fold in her brow indicated an almost painful concentration; while the right hand, passing over the right shoulder of her little daughter, a beautiful child, who pressed against her mother's side, grasped a heavy purse. The child's eyes were also fixed on the wedding-ring; her hand on the purse, her foot on the poems and flowers.

I meant to indicate a great deal in my statue, and I hope I succeeded in indicating something. I had many sug-



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had found that another two hundred pounds would be required for the completion of the statue, which stood on rather an elaborate pedestal. However, my guests made nothing of this difficulty. Such was their enthusiasm that we began discussing what should be the next statue I should execute, Stringer even insisting on a representation of Socialism without getting kicked out. The following week there was to be an election of the vestry, and after that Stringer declared they would begin in earnest a true municipal life.

The election came, and everything was changed. The more substantial citizens, who had seen the rates rising rapidly and their most serious interests threatened, had put their heads together, and easily turned out Stringer and his progressive friends. Of course they

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could not immediately reverse the policy of their predecessors, but they certainly did not enthusiastically forward it, and, among other changes, refused by a large majority to vote the two hundred pounds still required before the statue of Prudence could be erected. Burdened as I was with debt, it was impossible for me to do anything to save the situation, — the result being that Prudence was returned on my hands, and stood mocking me in the middle of my studio.

Stringer's energy was indomitable, and he went round personally, I believe, to every well-to-do citizen in Somerville, and wrote me up so outrageously in every number of the *Raree Show*, that people began to ask if I had bought the paper.

Things were getting desperate, when

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one evening, as I sat haggard and anxious in my studio, Stringer burst in.

"It's all right?" he shouted.

"Thank God!" I cried, — the English air had made me devout.

"Giles has given the two hundred pounds."

"What, the publican?"

"Yes, the landlord of the Queen's Oak, and the chief man on our present vestry. He's bent on getting up as much popularity as he can in view of Local Veto. I worked it for all it was worth, and fairly frightened him. Come along; he wants us to drink success to the statue."

"All right," I replied, not without qualms, for Giles's whiskey is a somewhat rapid poison.

"He's made one small condition, which I'm sure you won't mind."

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“Of course,” I groaned. “What is it?”

“The statue must be called Generosity.”

I took off my hat, which I had put on ready to start on our expedition, and stared at my friend.

“Then he expects me to do another?” at last I gasped.

“Oh, no,” answered Stringer comfortably. “You are to call this one Generosity.”

I’ll not write down my reply. My only excuse is that it was in French.

“Good Heavens! what’s in a name?” cried Stringer. “Don’t make a fuss about nothing. Of course I objected at first, but Shipton, who wanted it called Prudence, has consented, and the thing’s settled. Don’t unsettle it all again. I’ve been thinking over it all the way

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here. After all, generosity is founded on prudence. Without prudence there can be no true generosity. If you come to look into it, prudence *is* generosity. It means self-denial, and all the rest of it. Ask the Charity Organisation Society. Everything moves in that seemingly paradoxical way in these complicated times. For instance, I belonged to one of the most progressive societies in the world. It's called Fabian, after Fabius Cunctator, who didn't progress at all. If we want anything really done, we must carefully abstain from proving its futility by *doing* it. The only man of really high principle is the Oppositionist. I'll write you an article in the *Raree Show*, proving it to be the spirit of the age."

I had been walking furiously up and down my studio while he talked, and

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now, without saying a word, handed him a number of the *Raree Show* of three weeks ago, I had caught up, which contained a paragraph written by Stringer himself.

It ran thus : —

“ The most extraordinary point about Mr. Siffler’s talent is his power of putting into his materials the subtlest symbolism of which they are capable. There is absolutely no mistake about his meaning. For instance, we undertake to say with perfect confidence that if the rawest and most uncultured person were confronted with the beautiful statue which the young artist has created for the parish of Somerville, and asked which of our national virtues it embodied, he would reply without a moment’s thought — ‘Prudence.’ ”

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He read the passage aloud, and then, after clearing his throat uneasily, continued, composing as he went on : —

“ This he would reply without thought. Then a little reflection would extend this characteristic to its true issue. The power of suggestion, which is the essential gift of genius, a gift of which the artist himself is often unconscious, causing him to put into his materials qualities of which he himself was ignorant till they were pointed out to him : this supreme power of suggestion would come into play, and the fancied spectator would see this characteristic of prudence (*providentia*, or foresight), take its extended meaning and blossom into generosity (*generositas*), which means high race, and the high qualities which belong to high race. The arm thrown round the child shows Gener-

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osity's care for the next generation. The wedding-ring symbolises the quality of faithfulness so essential to the foundation of race ; and then the purse — how modern ! how thoroughly in accordance with the spirit of the times ! The representation of Generosity in the ducal palace at Venice pours gold pieces from her open hands. How false to Nature ! We have learnt that in order to be able to give we must also keep, — that it is only those who are prudent with their wealth who have the privilege of helping others. The spendthrift is never generous. Generosity is, in modern times, symbolised truly in Mr. Siffler's statue by a tight hold on the purse. In short, the full meaning of the artist's idea will, after a moment's contemplation, shine through the marble. Having *without* thought



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cried '*Prudence*,' our fancied spectator would infallibly proceed, 'expanded into Generosity.' "

"Bosh!" was the only comment I made on this piece of extemporaneous criticism.

"If it comes to that," continued Stringer, changing his tactics, "any kind of verbal description of a work of art is unnecessary and absurd. What does it matter what you call it? You have no more right to label it than any one else. Go to a concert and look at the descriptive programme of, say, a pastoral symphony. Would any one in the audience know that the day was breaking and the birds beginning to sing, and the dairy-maids blithely going to their work, if his programme did n't tell him so? What does it matter how things are described?"

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“Not a bit,” I admitted.

“Then we’ll call it ‘Generosity’?”

“I’m damned if we do!” I answered, thoroughly British by this time.

“Lefarge would laugh at your scruples,” sneered Stringer, trying a fresh opening.

Now Lefarge was certainly the artist who had most of my admiration. He had no taint of what is usually called morality, and would have labelled Mesalina “Innocence” if he had got £10 more for his statue.

“Lefarge’s work is so good that it does n’t matter what you call it,” I replied sulkily. “You can’t make a fool of him. I don’t feel quite so invulnerable. But I agree with you to some extent,—and I’ll tell you what I’ll do. They shall have it without any label at all. Let it stand before their

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infernally municipal buildings and speak for itself — if it can.”

“By Jove, you don’t know much about the British public,” cried Stringer. “Do you know what would happen? They’d have it off its pedestal on the first foggy night. There’s nothing so irritating to them as not to know what to call a thing. They don’t particularly care what it *is*, but they *do* want to know what it’s called, or how the devil are they to talk about it?”

“I’m not Mrs. Jarley, and my work is not convertible,” I ended; and Stringer departed in a rage, cursing what he called my Nonconformist conscience, and prophesying certain ruin to my career.

His prophecy was only too likely to be fulfilled. How I hated that statue of Prudence! If I had not been ab-

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sorbed by it ever since I had been in London, I might have obtained some work in a small way which would have kept the wolf from the door — but after my disappointment I had not the energy to seek it. I thought of going to law with the vestry, but going to law cost money, and I had none.

Matters grew worse and worse. Duns knocked hourly at my door, and my landlord threatened to distrain for his rent. At last I ventured to put the whole case before my well-to-do uncle and to ask for “advice,” by which I meant assistance. I received from his young wife, who had been originally engaged as a nurse for a dangerous illness which clouded his later years, and who now wrote as his amanuensis, a letter which showed that he was at any rate well taken care of in his old age. He

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had acquired a totally different style, too, the good-natured brusqueness which had always characterised him being replaced by a careful and well-balanced phraseology, which seemed to belong to the handwriting of the letter. "He had to deny himself the privilege of helping me in the exceedingly high-minded course I had marked out for myself. If he might presume to offer me advice, he would point out that a truer pride would accept good fortune without cavil or crotchet. No doubt my patrons knew what they wanted better than I did. If he helped me further he would be obliged to make others suffer, a very false sort of generosity," — I thought of Stringer ; — "it was, indeed, ungenerous on my part to inflict on him the pain which this refusal cost him. In future he would spare himself

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this distress by returning my letters unopened.”

I felt lonely and heart-broken. This was the point I had reached after years of solid work and endeavour.

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### CHAPTER II

#### EIKONOKLASTES

ONE night, after a day's aimless wanderings through the London parks and a visit to one of those extraordinary music halls where the Londoner seems to get his chief delight and recreation, I returned, weary and desperate, to my studio. The inability to work or enjoy had reduced me to this loafing, and the loafing had driven in on my brain all the sordidness and ugliness of life as I had never felt it before.

Perhaps the time is not far distant, I brooded, when I should make one of those beaten warriors driven by the struggle for life to the sanctuary of the

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London parks, where in rags and squalor they sleep secure from the inexorable laws of motion enforced by the London policeman. I wondered how these poor wretches spend the night. They can't be always sleeping, and I felt quite sure that they did not possess will and energy enough for crime. I decided that they must wander about all night. I had got so far myself several times lately, simply because I could not sleep, and I should have assuredly passed this night wandering about London, if I had not been forced to take shelter by a heavy thunder-storm which was now pealing over my head and flashing into my studio.

I had not troubled to light my lamp, but had flung myself into a large leather arm-chair which had been made in Spain three centuries ago, and was one of the



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principal ornaments of my room, and there I sat, brooding.

My studio had been converted, long before I took it, from an old stable, and its irregular roof had never been shut out of view by a flat ceiling. One side of it — the side I was facing — had been plastered and prepared for fresco by my predecessor, who had, however, died before he could deface it, and I had spent the two or three days I was waiting for the clay for my statue, in doing a decorative picture in black and white. Thanks to Nidor, who had held me down by the scruff of the neck to working on the flat while I was longing to be modelling, I could draw fairly well, and I had amused myself by representing a grotesque dance of death which ran all up the ceiling and appeared to skip out of the large skylight which

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made up the other side of the roof, — the composition a little resembling the flight of swallows so often seen on screens.

I was now sitting with my back to the skylight, and the repeated flashes of lightning lit up my handiwork very appropriately. The little skeletons seemed to be hopping and skipping, and vaulting over each other's backs in endless succession from my studio into the night. My spirits stirred as I watched them, although one or two of the largest seemed to point to my statue jeeringly, as they sped on their way.

The whistling of the wind and rain, and the rattle of the thunder, somehow suited the restless state of my mind, and I laughed aloud as I realised that there was one short, easy way of settling my difficulties that no vestry could take

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from me. "I can skip out of it all as lightly and easily as any one of you," I shouted aloud to my friends on the ceiling as a more than usually vivid flash revealed them to me. It was at this moment that I heard a deep voice behind me pronounce my name, "George Siffler." I heard it quite distinctly, and, strangely enough, for a moment was scarcely surprised at it. I had been so much by myself since my disappointment that I had got into a way of living in a half dream. It was only on the repetition of my name that I sprang up and looked behind me to see where the sound had come from.

At first I could see nothing in the darkness which followed on the last flash of lightning, and a more than usually loud peal of thunder prevented me from hearing anything further.

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"Who's there?" I asked, as its echoes died away. A fresh flash lighted up my studio and answered the question for me. A figure of a man of colossal height was standing near me. His hand, holding in it something I could not distinguish, was stretched towards me, and I must confess that my heart beat faster as I effected a masterly retreat behind my statue. The name seemed to me more appropriate than ever.

As the next peal prevented for the time any further remark, I filled in the interval by striking a match.

"George Siffler!" once more said the deep bell-like voice which I now perceived came from the figure in my room.

I lighted a candle before I spoke again, and peered hard at my visitor to make sure that he was real.

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The colossal figure, somewhat diminished by candlelight, I now saw to be only that of a very tall man, and the object he was holding towards me, my own latch-key.

"I found this in your door," he said, still holding it towards me. "And as I saw the name George Siffler on the lintel, wished to make sure of your identity before handing it to you."

"Yes, I have the misfortune to be George Siffler," I replied, coming from behind the Prudence in rather a shame-faced way. "You rather startled me with your abrupt entrance. Many thanks;" and I took my key from him.

"Misfortune?" he echoed interrogatively.

"I am an artist," I replied, somewhat bitterly.

"Yes?" he said, again with a ques-

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tion in his voice, and as he was now looking at my statue I felt rather annoyed.

"A bad one, I'm afraid!" I continued, with modest but not quite sincere self-disparagement.

"Of course," he replied gravely, as his glance travelled meditatively up to the skeletons on the ceiling.

"At any rate, I'm glad to have the opportunity of affording you shelter in this storm," said I, feeling that it would be better to change the conversation.

"Perhaps you will increase the obligation by giving me some supper," he said, as he took the chair I had vacated so suddenly.

In Paris we had been pretty free and easy,—but I had never had such an eccentric request from a perfect stranger. At any rate, I was quite sure now that

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he was flesh and blood. I remembered, too, that I had not had anything to eat all day myself, and felt that the request was not altogether ill-timed.

While I was getting some tinned tongue, sardines, cocoa, marmalade, and other bachelor commonplaces from my cupboard, he sat in my chair, glancing round my room with keen, quiet comprehension. I noticed that his eyes glittered to an extraordinary degree, but this I put down to hunger.

By this time I had lighted my large lamp, and as it stood close at his side, I had a good opportunity of studying his appearance. Oddly enough, there seemed no sort of awkwardness about our silence, and I had ample leisure in my journeys to and from my cupboard for taking in, undisturbed, the singularly impressive and dignified

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figure which filled my arm-chair so amply.

There was nothing weird about him except the excessive glitter in his eyes, which were among the most beautiful I had ever seen, and completely dominated the face.

I had been struck at first by his great height, which scarcely seemed diminished by a slight stoop; indeed he appeared to stoop rather from strength than weakness, as if to get more on a level with ordinary men. It was what I should call a kindly stoop, — the stoop of a man who listens gently to a child. Perhaps his head was a little too heavy for his neck, though the shoulders on which it was set were broad and his whole frame massive. His physical strength must have been enormous.

His face was even more remarkable



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than his figure. Its most salient feature, next to the eyes, was the forehead, which stood out strongly above the nose, and was so well proportioned that the boss between the eyebrows, which some phrenologists have called want of conscience and others individuality, though very remarkable, did not destroy the symmetry of the whole. His nose was rather broad, but straight and well-shaped, his mouth of great sweetness and beauty, his facial line of Goethe-like serenity, and like Goethe in his later days, he had a decidedly double chin. His complexion was healthily brown, and his hair picturesquely grey.

But, after all, it was the eyes that made his face so different from any other I had ever seen. They seemed, I afterwards noticed, to change in colour with his feelings ; not only from "blue

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to green," like Browning's Pied Piper, — sometimes they looked grey, sometimes brown, and sometimes black. They were large and lustrous, and I suppose would be called hazel.

In spite of this continual change in his eyes, the feeling which his large restful personality produced on me was peaceful and satisfying. I was glad to have him there, and as the storm rolled away into the distance my own spirits grew calmer, and I smiled to think of my trepidation at his first appearance.

In a few minutes I had placed the full resources of my larder on a table between us, and we were busy at them. I had had no idea that I should be so hungry, but my rate of speed was nothing to his, my enjoyment of my meal feeble compared with his enjoyment.

We had eaten in silence, except for

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some necessary remarks which concerned the meal, and it was not till it was concluded and the débris removed that he began to examine me with those searching and brilliant eyes.

There was so much sympathy in his gaze that even with the remembrance of our opening conversation I felt no discomfort in its continued scrutiny. Bacon's description of the appearance of the old man in his "New Atlantis" somehow came into my mind: "He looked as though he had pity on mankind." It was indeed a look of infinite kindness and comprehension which beamed from his large grey eyes, — they were grey at this moment.

"And so *you* are an artist?" he asked, with gentle interest, — and again he looked at the Prudence. Such a look a kindly parent might bestow upon

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an infant's sand castle at the seaside. Without exactly feeling offended, I was somewhat saddened.

"You don't think much of my work?" I asked humbly.

He proceeded with the greatest clearness to point out its faults. They were sufficiently well known to myself, but he seemed to give them a fresher and more hopelessly ineradicable shape.

I admitted all his strictures, but said modestly I hoped to get rid of some of my faults.

"You will never get rid of the most glaring and the most fatal," he replied, "any more than this fourteenth century rubbish we are sitting on will blossom into a greensward."

I felt somewhat cheered at this speech. The rubbish we were sitting on happened to be a piece of genuine four-

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teenth century Venetian mosaic which on one of my holidays two years before I had borne home in triumph, after much bargaining, from one of the Loggie near the Castellamare Bridge. The irregular flags I found when I took the studio I had converted into a tessellated pavement, letting in the mosaic by way of centre.

"At any rate, I am condemned in good company," I said more cheerily.

"Then there is no such thing as intellectual growth," he replied, rising and looking taller than ever. "The Nineteenth Century is a booby who must play with the toys left by its clever little brothers,—brothers who died before they left the nursery."

By this time he was standing before a cast of a child by Donatello, shaking his head gravely.

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"Then you find no merit in anything my studio contains?" I asked, rather sarcastically.

"I only see faults," he answered serenely, — "not only in your studio, but in all studios."

"Ah! you are a critic then?" I inquired.

"The greater includes the less," he replied sententiously.

"You mean —"

"That I too am an artist."

By this time his eyes were blue, and flashing like burnished steel, and his immense strength and height seemed to tower above me almost oppressively. Who could he be? I thought I knew all the principal artists by sight; but I was quite certain I had never seen him before.

"May I ask with whom I have the pleasure of talking?" I asked.

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"My name is Leonard Vincent," he replied. "Of course it is unknown to you."

I admitted that I had never heard it before, a fact at which he appeared unaffectedly gratified.

"Are you as much dissatisfied with your own work as everybody else's?" I asked, as he gazed in sorrowful disapproval at a sketch given me by Nidor himself.

"With my own most of all," he replied simply.

"You must find the world very hideous."

"On the contrary, I find the *world* very beautiful, if artists would only let it alone."

"Then why are you an artist?" I asked.

"For two reasons, — or, if you like,

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one," he replied, stopping in his walk round my studio. "Because I will be, and because I can't help myself. Freedom in necessity."

If he had not spoken with so much dignity and conviction I should have suspected him of talking nonsense. He evidently meant *something*, and I was about to ask him what it was, when his walk brought him once more before my statue of Prudence, and egotism tied my tongue. For a long time he gazed at it, and then turned to me,—his eyes quite black by this time with intensity of feeling.

"This thing is not *yours*," he said, with the deepest and most thrilling tones I had heard from his melodious lips.

"What on earth do you mean by that?" I asked uneasily.



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"Did you choose the subject?" he asked.

"No!" I admitted.

"Do you know anything about prudence by your own practical experience?" he insisted, as his eyes travelled round my luxuriously furnished studio.

"No," I replied bitterly.

"Then tell me how you came to waste your time on it," he said, adopting the gentle and kindly air which suited him so well.

Briefly I told him the history of my work, with its last miserable chapter full in my mind, and as I told it my statue stood condemned to me. It was Stringer's, it was the Vestry's, it was the Devil's, it was anybody's but mine.

He put his large, strong, flexible hand on my shoulder soothingly.

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"I have been through it all," he said.

"And what do you think of it?" I asked dreamily.

"I think you have had a great escape," he replied. "You might have had this thing" — pointing to my unhappy effort — "in evidence against you for years. Now even if the statuaries of the present day was as perfect in its way as the Greek, it would be better away, but as the matter stands it is simply a laughing stock for future generations. What statue in London at the present moment, or of any capital in Europe, manufactured during the last hundred years, is not an absurdity to any man of sense? Does anybody regard them with any feeling but derision? Would you wish your name to be pilloried

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as the perpetrator of any of these 'abortions'?"

Dazed as I was by his air of commanding strength and conviction, I felt called upon to make some struggle for my art.

"I don't exactly consider my work an abortion," said I.

"Is it alive?" he asked.

"Not exactly," I admitted.

"Is it complete?" he continued.

"I suppose not," I groaned.

"Then it had no business to be born, and if you are so unhappy as to live long enough you will find that the next generation will agree with me."

"Oh, damn the next generation," I cried,—all the fight that was in me roused by his sweeping denunciations.

"That's what so-called artists try to do by leaving monsters behind them

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to make life drearier and drearier," he cried, smiling once more. "Happily the present generation is not skilful enough to do its work very well, so not much of its bungling will be preserved,—a healthy sign. Art in its more perfect form is always the result of decadence."

"How on earth can you prove that?" I asked, still struggling against his influence.

"You prove it yourself," replied he, "in your bungling attempts to advance; you instinctively skip Raphael and go back to Botticelli and Donatello. You try to continue an earlier, less-finished and consequently more progressive work. This has been called decadence. It is really a feeble recognition of the universal truth that growth means life, and finished work death. A true

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artist can never finish. It is quite against his nature to do so. You will find nothing finished in nature. Everything is growing in one direction or another. In the infancy of mankind, indeed, when the earth was flat and stationary to them, artists had the idea of finality, and such toys as marble statues were well made. They arrived at an extraordinary degree of technical perfection, a perfection which has proved the great enemy of progress. Since Kepler and Galilei, this kind of artist and his toys are doomed. An artist now is a man who has the power of growth in him. As soon as he ceases to grow, he ceases to be an artist. While he grows, he has no time, no inclination to leave work which does not satisfy him, — indeed, if he is true to his nature, he has an

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abhorrence of it. It is so in the world of poetry—the “ineffectual Angel,” as he has been called by a critic, is the poet of the century. He had the happiness to die without finishing. It is so even in the political world. Men are beginning to see that Mazzini is the great figure of the century because he accomplished nothing—while the Bismarcks and Cavours, the empire and kingdom makers, who seem to have accomplished so much, have simply retarded the progress of humanity and cramped with the iron bonds of militarism all true international growth.”

He might have been talking nonsense, but there was no doubt that he was thoroughly in earnest about it. I had not exactly connected my statue in my own mind with the progress of humanity, and only knew Kepler and

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Galilei by their statues. All I felt sure of was, that my work was a failure, and that I didn't care much what became of it.

After his last tirade Leonard Vincent continued his rapid walk about my studio for some time. Presently he stopped with an exclamation of satisfaction, and grasped a large hammer which I had used for knocking up some pictures on my walls.

I could n't resist a shudder of apprehension as he walked towards me with flashing eyes, brandishing this implement in his powerful grasp. But he only handed it to me.

"You know your course," he said, as he did so.

"And you want me to destroy three months' work?" I said, — taking the hammer, however.

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"It is Fate who is kind to you, not I," replied he. "You have been saved from a danger. Now it is your business to see that it does not recur."

As he stood towering over me, I felt so small and feeble that I positively had not the moral strength to resist him. And, after all, why should I resist? The instinct every artist has to destroy the work which continually disappoints him was strong in me. I longed indeed for some one to *believe* in my work, some one who would strengthen my own faith in it, which at present was almost at its last gasp. Alone I could do nothing against him.

"It is hopeless then?" I asked, moving towards my statue.

He pointed to it without a word, and I hesitated no longer. With a wild laugh of despair I raised my hand to



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strike when a loud knock at the door arrested it.

“Quick,” said Vincent, “quick, lest your will should fail, lest you should lose the precious use of it which Fate permits.”

But another knock, louder than the first, shook the room, and as though roused from a hypnotic dream I rushed to the door and opened it.

“Ah! Stringer!” I shouted joyfully, for it was my old friend. “Come in and help me against him.”

“Against whom?” he cried in astonishment.

“Leonard Vincent,” I replied, as we entered my studio, — and so introduced my visitor.

The effect on Stringer was startling. I have seldom seen a man look more terror-stricken.

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"You!" he said, fixing his eyes on my tall friend. "*You* here!" And then he paused, as though he was afraid to say more.

"Then you know Mr. Vincent,—and no doubt know his views on art?" I said, astonished and rather ashamed of Stringer's behaviour.

"Oh, yes, I know his—his—*views*," he echoed with white stammering lips.

I could not understand it. There was certainly nothing terrifying in Leonard Vincent's aspect at present. He had reseated himself in my Spanish chair, and it was only a look of kindly expectation which illuminated his large grey eyes,—they looked grey again now.

Indeed, after some observation of him, Stringer seemed to grow calmer,

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his only sign of expecting danger being the casual appropriation on his part of the hammer I had dropped.

"I knocked so loudly because I thought I should have to wake you, Siffer," he explained.

"Then you have some news, I suppose," said I.

"Splendid!" he replied, gradually recovering his usually enthusiastic style. "The Prudence — I mean your statue — is to be done after all."

"What!" cried Vincent, springing up.

At first Stringer looked rather startled, but after gripping his hammer tighter and glaring at my gigantic visitor like a modern Thor, he once more addressed himself to me.

"I saw you at the Polyglon," said he. "I had to write about the Living

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Pictures there. You looked so desperate that I was determined you should know the good news without loss of time. You had gone before I could get at you, and I had to hurry home and post my copy before one o'clock. It was for the *Mudborough Argus*. Lord knows what nonsense I wrote, but it's gone, and here am I with my good news. There's only one condition."

"Ha!" interjected Vincent, loudly and hopefully.

"It's to be called Chastity," continued Stringer.

"Chastity!" I echoed.

"Yes, it was Giles's wife who settled it. She was his barmaid, you know, before he married her, and used to — now, don't for Heaven's sake be a fool," he went on. "There's the

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wedding-ring, there 's the child — evidently born in lawful wedlock; there 's the purse, which, after all, has something to do with it; there 's everything — ”

“Including ‘the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire’!” cried Vincent, with a laugh of good-natured scorn. “Surely you won’t fall into this pitfall?” and he pointed to the flowers under the statue’s foot.

“That ’s easily altered,” replied my friend. “You can turn them into flints.”

“My way is easier still,” said Vincent.

“What ’s that ?” asked Stringer, anxiously.

“The way Mr. Siffler was about to adopt when you interrupted him,” rejoined Vincent, pointing to the hammer.

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I stood between them irresolute.

Generosity was out of the question, but Chastity after all seemed to me very near akin to Prudence.

"You must settle it between you," I groaned, after vainly trying to make up my mind about the matter.

"But don't you know," cried Stringer, "that — that man is —"

At this moment a flash from the eyes of my tall guest seemed to wither the words on his lips, and for at least five minutes, as it seemed to me, they stood glaring at each other, one on each side of my statue.

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### CHAPTER III

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MY clock striking two seemed to recall my visitors to a sense of the strangeness of their situation. Leonard Vincent was the first to recover his good humour, and stood smiling down at Stringer's troubled countenance.

I could not help smiling up at him in turn, and we gradually broke into a laugh at Stringer's expense. He, however, seemed to see no humour in the situation, and still wore an anxious countenance.

Perhaps the funniest thing about our conference was that, although the storm was quite over and the moon shining

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brightly, Vincent showed not the slightest disposition to go. On the contrary, he once more seated himself at ease in my large chair, and with his head thus more on a level with Stringer's, seemed to be studying my friend as an intelligent inhabitant of Brobdingnag might have examined Gulliver.

"You are a professional art critic, sir, I think?" he began politely.

Stringer, still keeping an uneasy watch on him, grunted assent.

"An art critic!" echoed Vincent, and he seemed to bubble over with amusement. "It is sufficiently absurd to me that a grown man should seriously try to imitate humanity in stone and metal, and should put it up where men and women are walking about; but that another man should write about this triviality, and that other men again



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should gravely labour to read him, is, if possible, more ridiculous still. And this is all the majority of mankind know of the true artist, the highest and completest development of human progress. Let your friend destroy his rubbish and cease this trifling, sir," he added, suddenly becoming grave again.

"May I suggest to you," replied Stringer, who looked more himself again by this time, "that my friend, like me, has his living to get."

"His living!" echoed Vincent in amazement. "But your friend tells me he is an artist, — not a workman."

"But the fact of being an artist does not exempt me from the necessity of eating and drinking," I interposed, waking up to some interest in my own cause, and feeling decidedly ready to support Stringer on this point.

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“Not at all,” replied Vincent, “but it excludes the possibility of *working* for this purpose.”

“Then how am I to be fed?” I asked. “I am perhaps not unnaturally anxious to be satisfied on this point.”

“In the usual way with persons who cannot work,” he replied.

“How’s that?” I inquired.

“By the labour of others, of course!” answered he.

“But other people won’t feed me if I do nothing for them. Nothing is to be had for nothing.”

“Ah!” cried Vincent, springing up with an exclamation which made Stringer jump and once more clutch his hammer. “That is the theory I have done my best to explode. The best things cannot be paid for. If an artist pays for a thing, it’s not worth having.”

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“Then have you never paid for anything?” I asked.

“Not since I came to years of discretion,” he replied.

“And never sold any of your work?”

“Never!” he returned emphatically.

I looked breathlessly at Stringer, hoping that he would prove to my visitor the utter absurdity of his position. To my amazement and chagrin he seemed, since he spoke last, to have changed his feelings on the subject.

“There is much to be said on that side,” he replied thoughtfully, and then added politely and, as it seemed to me, quite irrelevantly: “May I inquire, Mr. Vincent, if you still live where — where — we met last?”

“Assuredly — except when I am travelling,” replied Vincent. “But to resume,” — turning and fixing me with

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those brilliant eyes. "You must not suppose I arrived at this conclusion in a day. Like most conclusions of any validity, it was the result of years of struggle and a gradual education in the real facts of life,—not, by the way, the education which is usually taught in schools and colleges. For a long time I tried to sell myself as hard as you have done, and found—but perhaps the best way will be to give you a short account of my career. If I can convince you that I have found my way out of the maze in which your mind seems to be so painfully wandering, and have found perfect peace and contentment in my present mode of life, I may save you in spite of our friend the critic." And he smiled good-naturedly on Stringer.

The latter, however, did not seem to have been listening to my guest's last

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remarks. He woke up with a start as Vincent concluded, and said with an almost crafty look on his round, good-humoured face : —

“ Will you excuse me, Siffler ? I want to send off a message I had forgotten to — the office. I know there is a district messenger place at Sloane Square.”

I thought at first he wanted to escape the story.

“ Will you return ? ” I asked anxiously.

“ Oh, yes,” replied he, “ I would n’t miss Mr. Vincent’s experiences for anything. I shall be back in ten minutes ; and meanwhile you ’d better take this,” he whispered, pressing the hammer on me.

“ Then you too wish me to destroy my work ! ” I gasped.

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“Not for the world!” he replied hastily. “I want you to promise me not to touch it till I return, but to be ready in case—in case. . . . Back in a few minutes!” and he darted off rapidly in the direction of the messenger office.

Wondering at the strangeness of his manner,—which, however, I connected with the Polyglon bar, followed by rapid writing,—I returned to my studio, hammer in hand, and once more felt the comfort of my new friend’s strong, calm personality. He was quietly pacing my tiled floor from end to end with the regularity and steadiness of a sentinel, evidently engaged in thinking over his past life, and methodically arranging it in his mind for my perusal.

I watched him for about five minutes before he spoke. I don’t quite know

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how it is that there came into my mind the idea of a tiger pacing his cage. About the walk of a tiger in confinement there is always something tragically restless. To me there seems something inexpressibly terrible and sad in the sight of that perfect strength and grace denied the exercise and freedom which have been the necessities of their development. But though Vincent's step had all the elasticity and massive poise of the tiger, there was not the slightest indication of restlessness in *his* movements. He would, I thought, have been happy no matter how circumscribed the space in which he moved. And yet the idea of a tiger remained with me, and I could not shake it off.

At last he spoke, and the full musical voice somehow now suggested the purr of a large cat. One always con-

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nects the cat with the hearth-rug, — with domesticity and comfort. Perhaps that was why I kept wondering, as I listened to my visitor, whether we should ever succeed in domesticating the larger members of the *genus felis*, — whether they would ever settle down among us and enable us to release them from their cages.

“You and your friend,” said he, “are confusing two distinct classes of men, — the large class of workers and the small class of artists. The artist and the workman have nothing to do with each other. Take the instance of the ant. We are told to consider the ant by one of the wisest of mankind. Let us consider it, — only let us consider it as modern men, and not as early Hebrews. Let us consider it with Darwin’s help, — an admirable work-



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man, by the way. You remember his idea of perfect boredom was to read a play by Shakespeare ! His business was ants and earthworms, and he made excellent use of them. He will tell you that there is one kind of ant that will starve rather than work, another kind that is obliged to work, and would probably starve if not allowed to do so. It's so with mankind. A still wiser Jew pointed to the lilies of the field, and has contrasted their raiment advantageously with Solomon's wardrobe, in spite, or rather because of, their total want of industry. No, my dear young friend, you might as well try and harmonise reason with religion as work with art. The men like Carlyle and Ruskin, who have tried to mix them all up together, have only ended in a wail."

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A soft and beautiful brown was the prevailing colour in his eyes as he enunciated these opinions in deep, gentle tones. Certainly *he* had no pessimism to reproach himself with. His serenity and cheerfulness were not the least remarkable part of him. I was quite certain, from the intense and heartfelt satisfaction with life which ran through all he said and did, that his own life must be very beautiful and happy.

I was about to ask him some questions on this point when Stringer returned. He was out of breath with the speed he had made to get back from the messenger office, but he now looked perfectly sober and composed. He afterwards wrote down for me Vincent's story, and between us we put some of it together. A good deal of it, of course, we had to omit from want of

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memory, but I give the main outlines just as we heard them.

Before he began I gave my guests cigars from the last of a box I had got on credit for the benefit of the Somerville Parish Council, and when we were all completely lighted and Stringer was stretched at length—if the expression is not inappropriate to so short a man—on a large divan, whither, by the way, I saw him secretly convey my hammer, Vincent began his narrative.

“I have sufficient modesty and modernity to wish for no more credit in the way of character than actually belongs to me. I believe profoundly in heredity,” said he. “Unfortunately, however, with one exception I know nothing with certainty of my ancestors beyond my immediate progenitors. In

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relating my life, I cannot go back beyond my father and mother."

Stringer's stumpy figure, which had perceptibly wriggled at the opening words of Vincent's narrative, here became more composed.

"My father," continued the narrator, smiling slightly at this pantomime, — "my father was a very remarkable man. He would never say a word about his own parents, and whenever I attempted to draw from him any information on this point he replied harshly, that a man should stand on his own merits, as indeed he himself did entirely. He was a tradesman, and kept a wife, one child (myself), and a small general shop. He never seemed to me to grow richer or to become poorer, and I was surprised when he died and left £2,000 for my support. I think on the whole

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that he was the strongest and largest-minded man I have ever met. I can give you no sort of portrait of him in words, but if you've — ah! this will do;" and seizing a small piece of prepared clay which lay near him, he very rapidly impressed on it some features with a power which absolutely startled me. They rerepresented a man with rather heavy fleshy brow, full lips, high cheek-bones, and short, blunt nose. This description sounds like millions of other faces; but the extraordinary skill and delicacy of the modelling had impressed on it an air of convincing truth and individuality. Though they lacked the culture and refinement of Vincent's features, there was still a likeness. Before I had time to take it from him, he had obliterated his work and flung it aside.

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"I never could get him," he muttered, "and he was the best piece of stuff I ever worked at," — and then more brightly: "He had a thorough contempt for me.

"He was what would be called now an individualist, but an absolutely fair one," he continued. "'Everything must be paid for,' was his motto, and he never grudged the cost himself. He was very proud, and I shall never forget his expression of almost demoniacal rage when a customer once told him to keep the change out of a shilling which had been given for an article valued by my father at eleven pence three farthings. He was fined heavily for the assault he committed on that occasion, and lost most of his customers, but he came from the police court prouder than ever. 'The man insulted me and

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had to pay for it,' he said grimly. 'Of course I had to pay in turn for my gratification.' And whenever he was at all dispirited he would call up the recollection of this incident, and derive a never-failing pleasure from the process. You can easily believe that he was not a very popular character. I don't think he had a friend in the world except my mother. She actually worshipped him, dying within a week of him through sheer despair. I never could discover any character in her, — and — no, I've always utterly failed to do anything with her," as I tendered him the clay again. "She had a very bad temper, and was not fond of me, — my father seemed to absorb her whole power of affection. She would listen to him reverently for hours, and with her he would talk a great deal, though

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generally speaking he was a silent man.

“ I listened to his long talks to my mother at first with a reverence which equalled hers, and then with a bewilderment which became stronger as I grew older. He would talk over the great names with which the newspapers abounded with the utmost contempt. His feeling seemed to be, that where a man succeeded in getting beyond a certain point, he was a mean fellow, — he did so without paying for it. But this must always be so in his opinion, and as long as he did not do so himself, he was satisfied with the existing order of things.

“ The amount of thought he spent on his accounts would have made the fortunes of six Chancellors of the Exchequer. I can see him now, his



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heavy head leaning on his clenched hand, poring over the day's takings. Every evening he would sit for three or four hours at a time, computing the exact relation between the things he had sold and the money he had taken. It was not simply a matter of striking a profit and loss account with him. He wished for no more than he *individually* had earned, and the calculations by which he arranged this matter used to make my head ache when he occasionally undertook to expound them to me. One of the least of the complexities in these calculations was occasioned by the variations in the exchange value of money. He seemed to have weighed all the usual economic methods, and to have found them wanting. He was not what is usually called an educated man, and had not

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arrived at a knowledge of these methods by reading, but by their obvious failures in practice. 'It is not only that the value of sixpence varies from day to day,' he would say — 'the banks will tell yer that; but its value to me varies much more: then the more valuable it becomes to me the less of it I deserve for the work I am able to give.'

"He had no respect for rules or generalisations of any kind. Every transaction stood by itself. Lady customers who expected a general shop to be a good gossiping ground never came near us if they could help it. My father used to charge them in proportion to the time occupied in selecting their purchases. I recollect one particular instance of this. An article which had been originally priced by

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him at sixpence, and at length selected after twenty minutes' inspection of other goods, jumped in the process up to tenpence. On the lady's expressing indignation, my father explained. It appeared that among various causes of its rise in price were to be put the fact that one customer, who had come in to the shop to purchase a pound of tea, had left it in a huff without doing so, owing to my father's attention being monopolised by the first customer; that he had twice had to fetch the article down from a top shelf; that the customer had handled it with not too brilliantly clean hands; that it happened to be the most inconvenient time in the day for him, — in point of fact, his dinner-time, and that his meal would be half cold and in various ways less palatable and digestible; and that

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the customer had put her wet umbrella on a packet of soda which would have to be taken down and dried and deterioration allowed for. Each of these items, with many others I cannot now recall, were valued by my father with the most intricate minuteness, and stated to the customer. He concluded by looking at his watch and saying, 'And as, my dear madam, I have now taken two minutes to give you the explanation you have demanded, I must now charge you tenpence halfpenny, my time being estimated by me at the rate of —' That woman interrupted him by paying the money, and beating a hasty retreat, convinced that she had had to deal with an insane person.

"Another curious point about him was that he never praised. He only recognised objects by their faults. If

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a thing was right, 'it was right, and did not impress itself on him. If it contained the smallest fault he immediately pounced upon it. My first awakening to the unpleasantness of life was a severe thrashing I received from my father for the most deadly offence I could commit from his point of view. I had appropriated a large piece of hearth-stone, — a material in which he used to deal, — and carved on it a representation of a human face. It was very rough because the stone would crumble away, but one of the customers saw some merit in it, and presented me with a shilling. My father came upon us and saw me take the coin, — and for the second time I saw what frightfully strong feelings lay sleeping beneath his usually composed demeanour.

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“This customer, too, thought him mad, and got out of the shop before my father could follow the shilling he had flung over the counter, — but there was no escape for me. My howls made the neighbours tremble, and if there had been such a thing as a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, I think my father would have found himself in the police court again. Even my mother appeared on this occasion slightly worried. Our customers fell off, and we had to get out of the neighbourhood. One customer — the lady I have mentioned — was so indignant that she refused to settle her account. My father was quite unmoved through it all. He had ‘paid’ me for the degradation I had so nearly inflicted on him and myself, and he was himself satisfied to pay

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handsomely for doing so. He was a great man.

“After that incident of the hearth-stone he gave me up. This glaring imbecile bent of mine, which showed itself to him for the first time in the act of defacing a useful article, for which I had not paid, with an impression from my own empty head, was incomprehensible to him. He decided that an idiot had been born to him. Looking over his past life, he admitted, like the just man he was, that he deserved to pay a still heavier penalty. He paid without complaining. Of course he did his duty to me. It was not in his nature to shirk anything, — and though he had completely given up hopes of my being of any value in the world, and would have welcomed my death, his notions would not allow him knowingly to

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contribute to it. On the contrary, he worked harder than ever to provide for a poor creature who had been so heavily and hopelessly afflicted. For I had very early come to the conclusion that I was an artist, and nothing would do away with the delusion, and in his opinion the difference between an artist and a pickpocket was only the difference between Broadmoor and Portland. Literature and art he held to be mere inventions of cunning, half-crazy knaves, devised in order that they might avoid doing their share of the world's work, — inventions only possible in a childish and indolent state of society. The Lowther Arcade and the British Museum were to him on a par, — and he gave way so far to my child's mind as to take me through both occasionally on holidays. 'Toys,' I heard him mutter



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as he stood before a colossal figure of Rameses II. ‘To think that human beings should play such fool’s tricks!’

“Needless to say, that with his strong nature ruling me as a child and with a deep sense of the justice of his view, the tendency to art which had been born in me had no opportunity for development. For a time I assisted him in the shop,—but this was given up or we should have been rapidly ruined. I never could remember the prices of things, which varied from day to day, sometimes from hour to hour, in my father’s shop, and indeed his calculus would have puzzled a Babbage.

“Where that tendency to art came from was a matter which long puzzled my mind. Certainly it was not drawn from my mother, who had so little akin to me that she scarcely seemed to me

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to be a mother. As far as possible my father's terrible will appeared to have pounded even this privilege, which belongs to all womankind, out of her. With my birth, which I am told was exceptionally painful, her interest in me ceased. At last I lighted on a solution of the difficulty. It was a freak of atavism. You noticed the form of my name — Leonard Vincent. It is my belief, my conviction, that I am descended from Leonardo da Vinci. My father was very angry when I mentioned this conviction to him, and he would of course never admit it, — but one day in a weak moment he confessed that his grandfather had come from Northern Italy."

"My father died of a long and terrible illness — everything about him was laborious — when I was seventeen, and

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ever since I have seen more and more reason to admire him."

My tall visitor here paused in his story for a few minutes, and Stringer, who had to my amazement held his tongue up to this point, began talking.

"As far as I can understand," said he, "if I may speak freely on the subject, your father was a very ordinary kind of Philistine."

"Not an *ordinary* kind," replied Vincent, in no way offended. "My father was an idealist in his way, though he would not have known what the word meant. He was, as I told you, a *just* individualist. He knew that *his* world would not hold together without this principle of justice, which by his *life*—for he had not words in which to express his ideas—he maintained should be implanted in each man's breast.

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The ordinary Philistine only desires as much as he can get for himself, irrespective of the fact that he has earned it. If you go to an ordinary tradesman of to-day, he will perhaps be able to speak a shibboleth composed of the three words 'supply and demand,'—and that is enough for him. Armed with these magic words, he imagines himself to be endowed with the right to get as large a profit as he can, without coming into contact with the criminal law. My father, on the other hand, wanted nothing he had not earned himself, and he worked all his life, which was the most toilsome life I ever saw, to carry out his idea."

"He was attempting an impossibility!" cried Stringer.

"Maybe," replied Vincent. "One of his *acted* maxims was, that to make

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the impossible possible was the only thing worth living for. This maxim I have inherited myself,—with many other impossibilities common to the whole human race. I can only tell you his labours were Herculean. I have dwelt so long on his character because my own, as often happens in families, was partly formed by repulsion from his. I recognised the justice of the maxim,—‘Nothing is to be had for nothing,’ but I declined to believe in what is usually called justice. During most of my life I have endeavoured to obtain ‘everything for nothing,’ and at last I have succeeded. I am an artist who will never produce a work of art.”

He looked so like Leonardo da Vinci in dignity and strength at that moment, that I felt almost inclined to agree with him as to his ancestry, and was sorry

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that he did not wear a beard, to complete his resemblance to the Prince of Artists.

As he broke off, Stringer took the opportunity of going to the door, as he *said*, for a breath of fresh air; and indeed he looked so pale and troubled that I followed him for a moment to ask if anything was the matter. I found him looking eagerly and expectantly down the street towards the east, where the day was faintly breaking.

"What are you looking for?" I asked.

"Nothing, nothing!" said he hastily.

"What do you make the time?"

"Half past three," I replied.

"Scarcely time yet," he muttered.

"Time for what?" I asked. But we had now returned to the studio, and he rapidly changed his manner.

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"Time for breakfast," he replied with his usual liveliness. "You people had supper, I suppose. I'm getting hungry. Suppose you give me a cup of cocoa while Mr. Vincent tells us how he has managed to get what we most of us want — 'everything for nothing.'"

I did what he wished, and we once more settled ourselves to listen.

## THE ARTIST'S HOME

### CHAPTER IV

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“As I told you, I do not claim *all* the credit for my success,” continued Vincent, smiling. “Fate had much to do with it, in making work as hateful to me as it has ever been to all true artists and teachers, Jew or Christian, Mohammedan or Buddhist,—for by none is work even hinted at, in their ideal life or heaven. It also made it as repulsive for me to put any envelope on my growing idea as it would be to put a live man in a coffin; as distressing to let my natural development be distorted by the selfish wishes of other people as it would be to submit my



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limbs to the rack. All this I inherited by the divine right of being born. The part of my success with which I wish to impress Mr. Siffler is the intelligent will which has enabled me to reject what Marcus Aurelius calls the unnecessary parts of life. I mean that it has made me happy to do without the things for which artists usually sell themselves.

“After my father’s death, I found myself free to practise art, and determined to go abroad and discover what had been done in painting and sculpture before setting to work myself. His will had, however, been made in a very inconvenient way. The hundred a year with which my legacy provided me, and which I was to receive by quarterly instalments, I could not anticipate by a single sovereign. Having ascertained

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this, I offered my trustees a composition. They should hand over to me half the fortune and keep the other half for themselves, and we would cry quits. My artist's eye had taught me more about these men than my father was capable of learning, and I thought such an arrangement would be the best, and possibly the safest for me. I was too late. They had already, under stress of bad fortune, appropriated the whole. As I told you, my father had no friends. His knowledge of character was naturally scanty, and he had chosen two gentlemen, partners in a large firm with which he occasionally dealt, who had a great name in the Nonconformist world as philanthropists."

"And you did n't prosecute them?" asked Stringer.

"I should never have wasted my life

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in that way," replied Vincent. "But even if I had, it would have been useless. One died soon afterwards by his own hand; the other was prosecuted by other people, and is still maintained by the State.

"My position was now embarrassing in the extreme, and was likely to become painfully so. Regarding me as mentally deficient, my father, while closing the door on the arts, had not brought me up to any trade. Fortunately I remembered the name and address of the gentleman who had given me a shilling for spoiling the hearthstone, and to him I went and explained the position.

"He happened to be a friend of a great American millionaire, renowned for his munificence to artists. This millionaire gave me something to sketch,

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and was so pleased with it that he sent me abroad to study. I went on studying as you did, Mr. Siffler, as long as I could, but I had even greater advantages ; I spent ten years in all, travelling about the world, studying works of art, and living in many studios ; and I should probably be studying in the same way still, if my friend the American had not, at last, after repeated suggestions to that effect, insisted that it was time I left off studying and began to work. Up to that time I had produced nothing which I had not subsequently destroyed. But now, driven to it by the fear of losing my income, I came back to England and reluctantly set to work. I was equally facile at painting and sculpture. My patron chose sculpture. He wished me to burst upon London with a colossal

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statue. His wife had taken some disgust at her countrymen, and he was settling in consequence in our island. This statue was to represent the genius of England. If I was successful in that, I was to do an even more colossal statue of himself. An enormous studio and all necessary tools and materials were given me, and I started on my ridiculous task. My patron had playfully decided that if I was not shut up I should never be induced to finish, so I was locked in, my food and drink being supplied from outside. He had to leave England for a few months to settle some of his financial undertakings,—which, by the way, were so intrinsically simple that my father would have settled them in about five minutes,—and when he returned my work was to be done.

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“ Being patriotic at that time, I determined to show all the weak points in the English character with great distinctness, with the hope of ameliorating them,—not the conventional weak points of the comic newspapers, but the real ones, the stolidity and muddiness of intellect, the gluttony and drunkenness, the self-sufficiency, hypocrisy, and brutality.

“ The day came round when my patron was to view the statue for the first time. He had made a great feast, and had invited a great number of friends to the function. They were all in high good humour after the dinner, which was the most luxurious I have ever eaten. But when the statue was unveiled to the strains of ‘ Rule Britannia,’ which was played with all their skill by the Hungarian band, the con-

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sternation was extreme. My patron made a speech in which he apologised to his guests. He had, it appeared, intended the statue as a compliment to the English people among whom he had intended to spend his millions, and had expected to see a sort of superior Britannia of the penny coins. I had entirely stultified his purpose. 'I am now an English gentleman, sir,' said he, with a strong Western accent; 'I have already purchased large landed estates here; I have built a magnificent town location; I am running a Conservative paper and supplying the funds for what I hope and presume will be the national theatre, and it would be a most ungentlemanly thing to publish this libel on my fellow-countrymen.'

"The company having loudly applauded him, dispersed in confusion,

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and I spent the night in demolishing my statue, which I had for the last month been longing to do.

"This was my first grave lesson in the facts of life. If I had been more sensible, it would also have been the last. But, like you, Mr. Siffler, I went on trying to sell myself—and always with the same result. I found that I had no objection to receiving assistance from other people, such as my friend the millionaire, but when it came to paying the price, I failed."

At this point in my guest's story I regret to say I dozed off. Stringer, however, who is accustomed to "interviewing," seemed to get a good deal of it down, but tells me he is using it for a novel to be called "An Inartistic Artist," and has asked me not to publish it here.



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When I woke from my nap I had a little difficulty in realising that it was five o'clock in the morning and that my guest was still placidly recounting his experiences.

"At last," were the first words which gained my attention, — "at last I admitted the impossibility of doing anything that the world wanted, and after great humiliation and bitterness of spirit I made the discovery that the world was right. *I* was not satisfied with anything that I did: neither was the world, though for different reasons. I found that I was expected to reflect a number of conventional falsehoods, — and that this, in the world's mind, was the function of art. 'I am ugly,' said the world, — 'give me something beautiful, something not myself.' Being an artist, I did not agree with the world in

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its self-contempt. I found it so beautiful that I dared not tamper with its wonders and could only enjoy them."

"And did n't you ever feel the desire to create?" asked Stringer.

"Every child desires to create," replied Vincent. "As he becomes more intelligent he sees the impossibility of doing so. Oh! I had my time of 'Sturm und Drang,' perhaps no one more so. Like Keats' *Saturn*, I cried, —

" ' Cannot I form ?    Cannot I fashion forth  
    Another world, another universe  
    To overbear and crumble this to nought ? ' "

"Since I discovered that that was out of the question, and that I should have to rest satisfied with the world, not indeed as it *is*, but as it *grows*, I began studying its growth with a new spirit,

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and while I was more and more convinced of the absurdity of working at my art, I became almost happy, and should have been quite so but for the difficulty which Mr. Stringer has suggested. I loved the world so well that I was unwilling to leave it; in other words, I objected to being starved to death.

“Up to this point, as I told you, I take no credit for my attitude. It was the gradual development of my truest self, — but now I had a real problem, which required all my will to cope with. It is the problem which you will have to face, Mr. Siffler, if you are true to yourself.”

“I had slightly dozed off again, but his ringing tone set me broad awake.

“It is the choice between sacrifice and prayer. Holding with every artist

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that self-sacrifice is the most damnable of all the deadly virtues, I chose prayer, — prayer to the powers who give and withhold the breath of life, that I might be allowed to live; and I have been a happy man ever since.”

“By prayer, then, you mean beggary?” remarked Stringer, sitting up.

“If you like to call it so. But there must be no imposture about it,” replied Vincent. “It must be beggary pure and simple, as prayer is. It must not be the false beggary of the Franciscan friar or the Buddhist yogi or the Mohammedan mullah, or even the would-be member of Parliament, or any other person who has a legal license to solicit under false pretences your suffrages or your cash. It must not be for a great idea, it must be for yourself, to keep you from starving.”

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"But by that you sacrifice the very independence you are claiming," interposed Stringer.

"*I* claim independence!" rejoined Vincent in amazement. "I consider that independence is our modern curse. It is easy enough to *give*. To be able to receive in the right spirit is the summit of modern education,—the education of princes and emperors. How gracefully does the modern king take all that the half-educated populace are only too delighted to shower on him! Here you have the highest manner. As you descend the social ladder you find this spirit becomes more and more attenuated, till you come through the honest tradesman like my father, who only wants what he has earned, to the working-man, who only wants bread, and is anxious to give his very soul for

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it. Artists, like kings, depend on the whole community. They should *take* from anybody who has anything to give them. The only condition they should make is that they should *give* nothing in return."

"Then there should be no artists!" exclaimed Stringer, indignantly, by this time on his legs.

"That was my father's opinion," replied my guest, nodding his head gravely. "Being an artist I am unable to agree with him."

"'It is more blessed to give than to receive,'" quoted Stringer.

"Easier," retorted Vincent, "but the other is the higher function. It requires an artist or a king to do it perfectly, and there are not many men in either profession. Prayer was ever esteemed nobler than sacrifice."

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"I've sometimes, I admit, applied to a friend for pecuniary assistance," admitted Stringer, frankly, "but I did n't find it ennobling."

"You mean you sunk to *borrowing* money?" asked Vincent.

"Well, I certainly did n't expect it to be given me," replied Stringer.

"That was why you found the process degrading," rejoined Vincent.

"I've tried both ways," said I, thinking of my uncle, "and I find people a deucedly deal unpleasanter when they don't expect to see their money back."

"I was not thinking of the respect of other people," said Vincent, gently. "That is indeed one of the things which are numbered in Marcus Aurelius's unnecessary parts of life, and which I pride myself as an artist upon

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doing without. But the *opinions* of people which are obtained by this process are invaluable in acquiring a knowledge of one's own character as reflected by the world. There are very few people, either those who give or those who withhold, who will not tell you very candidly what they think of you on these occasions. Generally those who refuse are the most plain-spoken and liberal in their expressions. Indeed, this fact seems to me to prove the inherent beauty and generosity in human nature : even where circumstance or conscience prevents a man from giving you what you ask for, he cannot bear that you should go quite empty away, and therefore gives you — his opinion. What greater gift could you desire than a piece of a man's mind, — the central portion of him, — and how difficult it is



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to obtain it from a sensible man until you ask him to give you something else !

“ And now,” he concluded, “ before I say good-bye I shall beg for two things. I will ask you, Mr. Siffer, as a fellow artist, to destroy that unfortunate product,” pointing to the Prudence. “ You, Mr. Stringer, I will beg to give me five shillings to take me back to — ”

“ At last ! ” cried Stringer, holding up his hand to arrest our attention, and ignoring Vincent’s requests, — “ at last ! ” And as we listened we heard the rattle of wheels and the stopping of a vehicle of some sort at my door.

Vincent only smiled, and, pushing Stringer on one side, strode to the street door, which he threw open.

“ Welcome, gentlemen,” said he, as

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he shook hands with three sturdy men who got out of the waggonette which stood at my door, leaving a fourth on the box to take care of the reins,— “welcome! I was returning by the early morning train. But you have anticipated me. It will certainly be pleasanter to drive home on this beautiful morning. I shall not after all have to ask you, Mr. Stringer, for that five shillings. Instead I will beg of you, Mr. Siffler, to give my friends some refreshment after their drive.”

“Then your home is—” I was beginning, but Stringer interrupted me.

“The Stanwell Asylum,” he cried excitedly, “and these are three of the attendants. I’ve been over it, and recognised him at once. I was in an agony of terror for you and myself till I heard these people coming.”

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"Yes, we got your message about five o'clock, sir," replied one of the party,—a large fair man, who was, however, dwarfed by Vincent as he led the way into my study. "But you need n't have been alarmed. Mr. Vincent would n't have hurt you. He's never been violent since we've had him."

"Then why is he shut up?" I asked, looking at the strong, sagacious face of my guest, who in his turn was regarding the whole party with a beneficent smile.

"Why, sir," said a little wiry fellow who brought up the rear, "you see he *will* beg. At first his friends did n't know what to do with him. Thank you, sir, just a *little* drop,"—as I helped him to some whisky and water. "Twice he's been before the magis-

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trates, and though the law was dead against him they would n't commit. At last they must have sent him to prison, if two doctors — friends of his — had n't said he was n't fit to take care of himself. I know he took care of me last time he got away."

"I hope you suffered no unnecessary inconvenience?" asked Vincent, politely.

"Why, no, sir, — not to speak of," replied the small man. "Of course you had to make the gag a bit tight."

"I knew you would be found by Mike on his rounds," explained Vincent.

"Oh, yes, that's all right, sor," replied the last of the attendants to speak, — a broad-faced, good-humoured man with a strong Milesian brogue. "He'd only been toied and gagged two hours when I found him."

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"You see, sir," added the smaller man in explanation to me, "he's so blessed strong and so quick and quiet in his movements,—more like a tiger than a man, though he's as gentle as a lamb all the time,—that there's no resisting him if he takes you single-handed. Lord bless you, a weaker man would have had to half kill me before he mastered me,—but Mr. Vincent has no more trouble than if I was a baby, and he handles me as tender. Your health, sir," as he too refreshed himself from what I called the parochial whisky.

"The fact is," said Vincent, "that I occasionally become tired of the Home provided for me by the nation, and then I take the only available means of leaving it. But that does not often happen, and I am always

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glad to get back again. Good-bye, Mr. Siffler. Don't let another day, especially such a lovely day as this is going to be, go down on that mistake of yours. And now, gentlemen, if you are ready, we will start for home."

Stringer and I followed them to the door. Vincent was right. It was a beautiful morning after the storm,—fresh and bright. The golden glow of the dawn lighting up our street made it appear squalid and shabby. Stringer's face, too, certainly looked unbecomingly haggard and over-nightish, and I had no doubt mine looked as ugly to him. Even the weather-beaten attendants at the asylum showed signs of fatigue. Leonard Vincent alone looked fresh and serene, and seemed to be in possession of his full vitality. He snuffed up the morning breeze with

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a large enjoyment which would have provoked my envy, — if I had seen it in a sane man.

“Hope to see you among us soon, Mr. Siffler,” he cried, gaily waving his hand as the trap drove off.

“The Artist’s Home!” I caught myself murmuring, as I crept wearily to bed.

## A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT

### CHAPTER V

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THE question of the statue was settled for me after all. I had got wet on that stormy night, and had sat for hours in my wet clothes. The disappointment and worry I had endured for some time past had pulled me down, and an illness ensued that nearly carried me off altogether. And now I learnt to do full justice to Stringer as a friend. He had a bed made up in my divan, and spent all his days and nights nursing me, except when he was working on his affairs or my own.

By the time I was convalescent he had had the "Chastity," as it was now



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called, copied in marble, put into its place, and ready for the ceremony of unveiling. All this was done without consulting me, the doctor saying I was too ill to attend to any business, and the first news I heard about it was in the *Somerville Sentinel*, in which I read the following passage:—

“To all our readers who are interested in the progress of art in Somerville,—we had almost said in England, for it is to be hoped that Somerville’s example will carry with it a wide inspiration,—we have an important announcement to make. The severe illness which the strain of work had occasioned to the brilliant young artist Mr. Siffer, we are glad to hear, is now over, and he will be able to be present at the unveiling of the statue of ‘Chastity’ in Somerville next month. Lady de Somerville has promised to per-

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form this ceremony in person. It would perhaps be ungracious on this occasion to point out that it was not till Lord de Somerville's property was being called upon to bear something like its share in supporting public institutions that he began to interest himself in public matters. We can only congratulate ourselves on having some kind of help, no matter what its motives, from the graceful and accomplished wife of this hereditary representative of the rights of property."

Of course I recognized Stringer and his "progressive propaganda," and taxed him with it when I saw him next.

"You don't know what things were like when you got ill, old chap," said he. "You were delirious for nearly a week, shouting out that you were a king, and were not going to work any more; wanting to get up and pull Nelson off

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his column and the griffin at Temple Bar off his stand. The Achilles in Hyde Park was to be melted down into pots and pans, and all the Georges and Queen Annes were to be thrown into the sea. I just took your place and settled everything in a rational fashion. All your creditors will be paid; your name is made, and I have got three more commissions for you."

What could I do but thank him and submit; I only stipulated that Lady de Somerville and the Parish Council should have the ceremonial entirely to themselves, and that I should not be present at the unveiling of "Chastity."

The great occasion came and went, and I was hard at work on a bust of Lord de Somerville for the Academy. It was to be presented to him by the leading citizens as a token of their re-

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spect for his public-spirited and disinterested support. So said the *Somerville Times*. The *Sentinel* said nothing on this occasion, though I am afraid that if Stringer had not been mainly instrumental in bringing it about the business would have been called a job.

One day, when I was hard at work at my bust, in walked Stringer in his usual excitable fashion.

"What do you think I've brought with me?" he asked.

"Another job?" I inquired.

"No, an order to go over the Stanwell Asylum. I'm doing it for the *Raree Show*," replied he. "Get on your hat and come on."

"All right," I said. "Wait till I've sprinkled the hereditary legislator; he's getting rather dry." And after moistening the clay I washed my hands, got

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into my out-door coat, and started for Stanwell.

Most of us know the charming grounds of this celebrated institution, which stretch almost down to the railway line, but comparatively few people know how comfortable the inside of the building is.

Stringer, who had some acquaintance with one of the resident doctors, was very heartily received by him, and I commenced asking about Leonard Vincent directly I was introduced.

"Ah, yes," said he, "he was spending the evening with you, I think, when we recovered him last. He generally looks up artists on this occasion. He sometimes believes himself to be descended from Leonado da Vinci, — the chap who had so much difficulty in finishing his pictures, you know. I am

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told he has a wonderful genius for drawing and painting and modelling and all that sort of thing, by the fragments he sometimes makes and destroys. I'm no judge."

Thus chatted Dr. Bartley, a brisk, cheerful little personage, as he led the way to the part of the building where he thought Vincent would be. He was rather reticent on the subject of Vincent's escapes. Stringer had heard that this extraordinary man possessed considerable hypnotic power, and asked the doctor whether it was true that he had once put two of his keepers to sleep and disappeared.

"Oh, *I* don't know," replied Dr. Bartley, rather impatiently. "It must have been before I came. I believe there were two attendants dismissed for intoxication just about that time, but

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we have a very good set of men now. Here's the man we call Vincent's enemy — he'll know all about it."

We had reached the reading-room by this time, and were introduced to a very thin, yellow-faced man who looked something like a clergyman. He was busy reading when we first saw him, and he seemed to be doing it, as I noticed he did everything, in an eager, hungry, almost ravenous way.

Glancing up, he asked us with a bitter writhe of the mouth what we wanted with him.

"We were speaking about Leonard Vincent," replied the doctor, nudging me.

Instantly a flame of anger seemed to heat his thin face to whiteness.

"That scoundrel!" he hissed as he started to his feet. "That enemy to

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the human race! I hear nothing but Leonard Vincent from morning to night. I seem to see him between the lines of this book; everybody in this place seems to talk of him. I hear his damnable bellowing voice in my dreams at night. But some day I shall have my chance against the great enemy of human brotherhood, and then we shall see."

"Mr. Chivers is indignant because Vincent does not believe in brotherhood. You do, of course!" nudging me again.

We hastened to express our belief in the great principle of fraternity, and Chivers returned to the book he was devouring, and which I had noticed was a *Life of Marat*.

"He was a great speaker among the Social democrats," explained the



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doctor, "but somehow this idea of Fraternity took the form of homicidal mania, and he had to be brought here. He thinks it's his mission to destroy any one who does not profess belief in human brotherhood as a panacea for every ill from which humanity suffers. Vincent is his special enemy, and Chivers thinks he could persuade all the patients to be of his mind if only Vincent were out of the way. He's made one or two attacks on him in spite of all we can do to prevent it; but Vincent treats him very gently, and holds him quietly down until one of the attendants takes charge of him. Ah, there's your friend's voice. It *is* powerful, is n't it? No wonder Chivers dreams about it. This way — he'll be in the theatre."

There is a charming little stage and

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hall for entertaining and diverting the patients in the Stanwell Asylum, and here we found most of them assembled, listening to Leonard Vincent, who was treating them in a sort of recitative to an extempore lyrical composition.

Stringer got out his notebook at once, and at the same moment Vincent came to an abrupt termination, which broke up the meeting.

The Hibernian keeper who had visited me with his comrades so early in the morning, touched his hat and claimed acquaintance.

"You should n't have tuk your notebook out, sor," said he. "There's many throyed to take him down, but not a wan has done it. Och! it's an illegant thrate to hear him recoite them pomes out of his own hid, though the Divil knows what they're all about."

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By this time Vincent had come down from the platform and joined us.

"I'm sorry to see by the papers you yielded, Mr. Siffler," he said, "but you may yet come to think with me."

By way of avoiding the subject I said that it was a great surprise to me to see him "on the boards."

"Ah, yes!" said he, "I have often thought that if acting could be carried on under proper conditions it might be the happiest of the arts. It can develop and improve from one second to another. It is flexible and natural, and above all not permanent. Actors have complained periodically of the want of perpetuity in the form of their activity, contrasting it pathetically with the other arts. They should rather consider it a glory that their art does

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not leave the dreary corpses which disgrace its pretentious sisters.

“Non omnis moriar” — “I shall not altogether die” — is the cry of the weak, or at least of the strong man in his weak mood. “This longing after immortality” is an unhealthy misdirection of consciousness. The poor, limited, and ineffectual attempt on the part of men to preserve their identity produces on the healthy mind the same feeling of disgust that the mummies in the British Museum caused me when my father took me there as a child.”

“It seems to me that your theory of life corresponds more or less with Gautama Buddha’s,” said Stringer.

“Ah! that’s the fault of the critical view of life,” replied Vincent, smiling. “It must always be digging up some

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dead and gone religion of which it really knows nothing, to label the persons with whom it disagrees. The feebleness of mind which rushes to this kind of generalisation to save itself from intellectual chaos is very pitiable."

Stringer was about to make some angry reply, when he suddenly recollected where he was, and the recollection gave an air of forced magnanimity to his small features which made a ludicrous contrast to the more real tolerance expressed on Vincent's face.

"And what about our immortal plays?" asked my friend with forced jocularity, returning to the subject of the theatre.

"Of course the plays are wrong," replied Vincent, genially. By this time we had reached the grounds, and were reposing on the bright green sward.

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“Take Shakespeare, for instance; people are only just beginning with a Titanic effort to throw off the yoke of that Jupiter of the drama, and the lesser gods of the Elizabethan age. No, no, Mr. Stringer, a play should not be written down, and reduced to the level of literature. In an ideal theatre the actors should extemporise. No doubt it would require athletes beautifully trained in body and mind to carry on such a representation of life, but it would be the most living picture we could get, and artists might be worse employed.”

“And what about the scenery of your extempore plays?” asked the little doctor with a wink at me, as he lighted a cigar.

“I would have plays which had their scenes in the open air, played in the

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open air," replied Vincent; "and plays which take place in rooms, played in rooms. The real drama of life generally goes on amidst quite small and unpretentious surroundings. But the whole thing is better left undone."

Much more talk we had beneath the elms at Stanwell on that pleasant June afternoon. Stringer has recorded a good deal of this too in his "Inartistic Artist," which will shortly be published, so it must not appear here. I must confess that I said good-bye to Vincent with great reluctance, and that I felt greatly flattered when he expressed sorrow in parting from me.

Before we left the asylum we were introduced to Dr. Meadows, the head physician, and tried to get him to throw some more light on his remarkable patient.

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"Has he told you the history of his life? He is fond of doing so," asked Dr. Meadows.

"I am working it up," said Stringer, glibly. "My own impression is that as an original man he met with so much opposition and had so much suffering in the tasks he set himself that they turned his brain."

"That's it, of course," said Dr. Bartley. "His father must have been mad from the same cause, and it shows the dangers in overstepping our finite powers. But Dr. Meadows has another theory about him. As the human brain is estimated to contain somewhere between six hundred and twelve hundred million cells, he thinks Vincent's apparent coenæsthesia —"

A slight frown from the other doctor checked him.



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"Don't frighten people with long words, Bartley," said the latter, dryly.

"But what *do* you think, though?" I asked eagerly.

"I think," he replied with some hesitation, — and then with sudden decision, — "I think that he helps to amuse the other lunatics." And though we pressed him hard, nothing further was to be got from him on the subject.

When I said good-bye finally, I left five pounds to be given to Vincent, and I must admit it was a genuine relief to me to know that it would not hurt his feelings and that I had not to scheme and fib to avoid offending his sense of independence. I even began to wonder whether the excessive tact and delicacy for which some well-bred and charitable persons are often so highly commended was not in itself a little

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unnecessary and pretentious, and to question whether any human being had the right to adopt this sort of attitude towards another.

But as I expressed these views to Stringer I saw the same anxious look on his face with which he had contemplated Vincent in my studio, and thought it better to be silent.

"I would n't talk like that to everybody if I were you, old fellow," he interrupted kindly. "It's all right of course, but everybody would n't understand it, and might think you ought to be taken care of."

After that day at Stanwell I found, strange to say, the hereditary legislator's features too much for me. After struggling with them for some time, I one day grew desperate, smashed the clay to pieces, and threw up the commission.

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Stringer was calling on me just after the act of demolition, and was furious.

This is the second bust you've destroyed!" he shouted. "If you go on in this way you'll soon find yourself in the late Mr. Vincent's place."

"The *late* Mr. Vincent?" I asked.

"Yes, his enemy Chivers has been too much for him. Here's an account of it in the *Mercury*."

I took the paper from him, and found that it was indeed as he said. Chivers had somehow managed to secrete a knife, and with the help of two other patients whom he had converted to his views, had attacked Vincent while he was asleep and fatally wounded him, finishing up by killing himself.

"'One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,'" he had shouted as he stabbed his enemy. Vincent, although

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suffering terribly, had pointed out to him that he had for the first time used the quotation in its true sense, often as he had spouted it from the platform, and that the whole world might be made kin by destroying personality, or in other words by death, but would never be so in life. This had led to Chivers self-destruction.

"They both died true to their creeds anyhow," said I.

"Chivers might have done so, but Vincent certainly did n't," replied Stringer, with an almost vindictive look on his face.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"He's left a picture behind him after all," rejoined Stringer.

I said nothing further, but as soon as Stringer had gone I started off for Stanwell to see that picture.

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The head doctor showed it to me. "I don't know," said he, "whether with the approach of death, as often happens, the dementia grew less marked, but he certainly was eager to finish this picture. He worked with extraordinary rapidity, — he only lived a month after the attack, — and although I know nothing of pictures, I can't help being struck with it."

It was indeed astonishing. Stringer afterwards poured forth his eloquence in praise of it. To me its merit was unspeakable.

He had asked that it might be called "Failure and Success." It represented a large landscape containing two principal figures and a group of subordinate ones, who were painted, oddly enough, in a corner of the picture. One of these powerful figures represented a

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man with a worn, almost cadaverous face, the muscles of which displayed an enormous amount of energy and effort. The mouth was pulled down at the corners, until it seemed to be enlarged to twice its natural size. The forehead was deeply marked with rugged lines, and the whole face had the eager look of a man who was determined to dominate, and whose whole life in consequence consists in battle and effort; stern and resolute, but at the same time emotional, vehement, craving for popularity. Power of work was in the face, and once there might have been power of thought; but this had evidently disappeared, buried beneath the mass of readily available formulas, necessary to a popular leader of men. Perhaps the fact that he strongly resembled a very celebrated man of our day may have

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caused me to read into the face more than any artist could possibly have expressed; but whatever the cause, to me all this was as clear as daylight. So it was to Stringer, — when I had pointed it out to him.

The crowd were engaged in throwing things at him: some threw gold, and other valuable or beautiful commodities; others threw rotten eggs, dead cats, and whatever refuse they could lay their hands on.

The face of the other principal figure in the picture was in complete contrast. Serene and contemplative, it was the face of a happy and contented man. He lay on the ground in a recumbent attitude, and seemed to be asleep.

This was the first impression I received from the picture. Then I observed that though the subordinate

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figures in the picture were very unevenly divided, there were a few people whom I had not at first noticed in the other three-quarters of the picture. I saw too that, whereas the crowd in the first quarter looked starved and crushed, and had scarcely room to breathe in their penned-up corner, in itself ugly and barren, the people in the other part, a landscape of remarkable beauty, looked happy and at ease.

A strong brick wall, not unpicturesque, overgrown with moss and lichen, divided the picture.

I then observed, not without a shudder, that on the head of the man who lay so peacefully asleep were some blood stains. Looking closer still, I saw that his head had in some way been crushed in, and that he had indeed undergone that touch of nature which



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Chivers had advocated. He was dead ; but just above him on the wall, marked also by blood stains, was a slight loosening of one of the bricks — so slight that at no long time hence it would have got fast again by force of the vegetable growth which would inevitably accumulate. Somehow I could not help hoping that somebody would give it another shock to further loosen it before this happened.

The crowd passed this recumbent figure without notice. The calm, noble face seemed to have no attraction for them ; they had only eyes for the other figure, who evidently kept their attention by his restless and determined activity and self-exploitation. One child, however, had his eyes turned towards the blood-stained wall at which he was pointing, a look of eager inquiry on

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his earnest, up-turned face. I thought he was asking the man who stood near what was on the other side of the wall. The man, however, was in the act of cuffing him, and pointing upwards to the shifting clouds and inane blue.

“Failure and Success” evidently applied to the two principal figures in the picture, but no hint was given as to which was which.

Whatever might be thought of the subject of the picture, there could be no doubt as to its execution. Stringer pointed out its merits in his happiest vein—the principal point he made being the masterly “handling” and the skill with which the artist had painted the red blood on the red bricks. Even the authorities of the National Gallery were induced to take an interest in it, and a rumour got abroad that they had

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determined to buy it, cost what it might.

At this Point Finck and Benedetto, the noted firm of picture dealers in Bond Street, stepped in and headed a syndicate which purchased the picture at an astounding price. Stringer himself was one of this syndicate. The government, he declared, would be *obliged* to buy the picture, and there was no reason why he should not profit by this knowledge. Since the Tory reaction as he called it, he had grown, I regret to say, less tender of conscience than ever. The opportunism of which he boasted became more marked, and he openly avowed that he meant to spoil the Egyptians — the Egyptians being a nation which had not seen the merit of his “progressive propaganda.”

This conduct occasioned a slight

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coolness between us, and for some three months I heard nothing more of the syndicate's negotiations with the National Gallery. I met Stringer occasionally, but he seemed constrained and anxious, and always changed the subject rapidly when I mentioned the picture. This struck me as rather odd, especially as one day when I was passing Finck and Benedetto's I was refused permission to view it. Benedetto, who was the artist of the firm, — Finck doing the finance, — and who, I am afraid, occasionally restored old masters for the gallery to an extent which amounted almost to producing them, was in the doorway looking very uneasy. I saw something was wrong, and insisted on seeing the picture. Benedetto grew pale with fright. He was a little man, who had sold himself,

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body and soul, to Finck, that he might be able to indulge in unstinted debauchery. It was one of the great wonders among artists that those shaking hands could copy the great masters with such extraordinary exactitude. Of course his nerve was gone, and as I had made up my mind on seeing the picture, I had no difficulty in putting him on one side and getting into the room where it hung.

A glance at it explained the whole mystery. The colours were rapidly fading out, and Benedetto was going to restore them.

I left the abject little fellow groveling on the floor, and weeping at the thought of what Finck would do to him, and sought out Stringer at once.

He admitted all the facts and demanded silence from me, pointing out



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that I should only be doing Vincent's enemy an ill-turn if I told the whole truth. The doctor was undoubtedly right, he said, when he suggested that the poor fellow's dementia had diminished on the approach of death. He had felt all the horrors, all the degradation to which his foolish sophisms had led him, and was determined to do one great stroke to redeem his career and benefit his fellow-men. He had succeeded in actually doing this, and now were we to allow the mere accident of bad pigments to destroy his masterpiece when he had such a wonderful copyist as Benedetto to set matters right? It would be brutal, it would be insane. He was sure I would see it as he did, if I thought for a moment.

Stringer's own conduct towards myself had much more effect on my mind

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than his arguments. Thinking over all he had done for me, how tenderly he had nursed me in my illness, and how ardently he had praised, and practically sold my work for me, I could not make up my mind what to do. I asked for the night to think the matter over, and nearly went out of my mind in doing it.

On the next day following my discovery the burden of decision was taken from me. The doctors at the asylum had discovered a letter from Vincent. It had been given by him to a visitor. Letters are often given in this way by patients, to be delivered to their friends outside, and the doctors and attendants always advise the visitors to humour the patients and take charge of the letters, which are of course returned to the authorities. Dr. Bartley

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had received this letter in due course, and had thrown it with many others into his waste-paper basket. His window being open, it had got blown into the grounds, and after some months was found by a patient, who insisted on its importance, and at last induced Dr. Meadows to read it. It ran as follows : —

“I wish before death takes the power to do so from me, to try whether my hand has lost the cunning it once possessed. This is a weakness on my part, due, no doubt, to the pain of body which poor Chivers’ knife has inflicted. The fear that I should lose consciousness before I have time to destroy the canvas on which I mean to paint, has stayed my hand till now, but at last I have devised a means which will enable me to indulge this caprice without leaving its traces permanently on human life. I have determined to make



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use of self-destructive pigments, which will begin to fade out from the moment they dry on the canvas. The receipt for this process I leave to the Professor of Chemistry at the Royal Academy, to whom I hope it may be of use. This must not be considered as a gift. I never give. I merely suggest. The only form of gift I recognise is a 'Donatio inter vivos.' A dead man has nothing to bestow, and a gift which is not to come into operation till death is no gift at all."

This was all. The letter was discovered on the very day that the National Gallery was to have completed the purchase of "Success and Failure." Finck and Benedetto narrowly escaped a prosecution for fraud, and Stringer nearly lost his position in the *Raree Show*. Although he had not been exposed by me, he blamed me most unreasonably for the whole trouble, and he

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declined to have anything more to do with me. The last of the three commissions which he had obtained for me during my illness — the only one which I had not thrown up — is a bust of the lady who suggested the title for “Chastity.” She has sat several times, and I find her more unbearable on each occasion. She has already set the report going in Somerville that I am insane. If she goes too far I believe *I shall* be.

. . . . .  
She has *gone* too far!  
. . . . .

*Note by John Polyphemus Stringer.*

The above curious narrative of my unfortunate and gifted young friend, Blake Siffler, explains itself. The painful incidents which led to his present

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residence in Stanwell are unhappily only too well known. Nothing but madness would have explained his behaviour towards the Somerville lady who was sitting to him, and which she complains was outrageous. It is only the theory of madness too that can account for his forcible entrance into Finck and Benedetto's gallery, where he hacked the late Mr. Vincent's picture to pieces, or his subsequent conduct at Somerville, where, before the police had time to interfere, he had, with a sledge hammer, destroyed his own masterly work. Poor fellow! he never recovered from the severe illness which followed the strain of producing that work.

I have kept his narrative exactly as he left it, except where I have deleted several very gross expressions about the charming lady I have mentioned,

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for whom he seems to have conceived the most unaccountable antipathy. This form of madness, the hatred of real friends, I grieve to say, included me, — as may be perceived by the close of this narrative. The fact that the celebrated gallery of Count Finck is still flourishing in Bond Street, — though Benedetto, alas ! is dead, — and that my fellow-citizens at Somerville have again returned me as parish councillor on my adoption of the Conservative Progressive Programme, will prove to a discerning public that the last part of Siffler's narrative took shape only in his disordered imagination.

I might indeed have improved my friend's literary style with advantage. I might have resented the somewhat fantastic fashion with which he has made free with my own personality — I am

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5 ft. 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ , not 5 ft. 4 in the first place — but let that pass. Though my poor friend had neither the accuracy nor modesty for literature, he was so fine an artist in his own walk of life that even this little book may be of interest.

I have visited him several times at Stanwell. He *seems* happy, perhaps happier than he has ever been, but this phenomenon Dr. Bartley has explained to me. “Dementia, speaking psychologically, occasionally takes the shape of euthanasia,—of being *too* happy, not indeed so often as that of melancholia or misery, but still, not infrequently. This, he says, was no doubt the disease of the poor wretches who sang at the stake in the times of persecution. Happily this mental disorder has been duly classified and explained, and no

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longer forms a danger to true progress and civilization.

My friend professes his perfect willingness to accept any gifts that may be sent to him by the public, but has a preference for money ; declaring, quaintly enough, that anything else seems to imply some lien or control over the gift by the donor, who must, unavoidably, to some extent be consulting his own taste in its selection.

THE END.



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